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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 001724

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SP](#) [PL](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: STATUS OF HONDURAN TROOP DEPLOYMENT TO IRAQ

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1243

[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 1309

[1](#)C. JUNE 15 INFO MEMO FROM DR. S. ZAKHEIM TO
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

[1](#)D. STATE 207638(ALL NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Larry L. Palmer for Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: Training continues for the all volunteer Task Force Xatruch (TFX), the 370 soldier contingent Honduras plans to deploy to Iraq by mid-August. The task force is composed of 35 officers and 335 enlisted soldiers. TFX will deploy as part of the Spanish Brigade in the Polish Division and will operate in the vicinity of An Najaf. TFX will work side-by-side with local police to patrol this major smuggling zone. This area has been pacified and the biggest expected threat TFX might face will be organized crime elements. Task Force officers informed PolMilOff that the unit's training was nearing completion and moral was high. Equipment and sustainment needs continue to be a major concern, that could delay the deployment of the Task Force. Also, due to the fact that TFX will deploy through Kuwait, a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the Government of Kuwait must be completed before GOH forces enter the theater of operations. END SUMMARY

Task Force Xatruch

[1](#)2. (S) Training continues for TFX, the 370 soldier contingent Honduras plans to deploy to Iraq mid-August. The task force, composed of 35 officers and 335 enlisted soldiers, is comprised of volunteers from throughout the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF). TFX will deploy (with the other Central American forces) as part of the Spanish Brigade under the Polish Division and will operate in the vicinity of An Najaf. TFX will work side-by-side with local police to patrol this major smuggling zone. This area has been pacified and the biggest expected threat TFX might face will be organized crime elements. The breakdown of TFX is:

1 Command and Control Unit with 13 Officers and 7 Enlisted;
1 Infantry Company with 5 Officers and 101 Enlisted;
1 Infantry Company with 5 Officers and 100 Enlisted;
1 Military Police Company with 5 Officers and 77 Enlisted;
1 Support Company with 7 Officers and 40 Enlisted.

[1](#)3. (C) TFX is commanded by COL Carlos Andino Cobos who recently returned from a survey trip to the deployment zone in Iraq. COL Andino reports that his biggest concern is the morale of his troops after arriving in Iraq. Apparently, the deployment zone near An Najaf does not offer any type of diversion when units are off duty. (Comment: The Honduran contingency will be deploying without any means to provide rest and recreational activities for its troops; alcohol is also not permitted. Also, a senior military officer expressed his concerns that the HOAF has not developed a mechanism for TFX soldiers to have even periodic telephone contact with their families back home during the deployment. The Hondurans will be quartered in housing vacated by departing U.S. Marine units with practically no conveniences left behind. Boredom will surely be a problem and COL Andino fears that none of his soldiers will volunteer to stay past the planned six month deployment due to the significant hardships they will face. End Comment)

[1](#)4. (SBU) The HOAF reports that of the 35 officers slated to deploy to Iraq, over half have served as part of the UN peacekeeping mission to the Sinai. Also, for the first time, Honduras will deploy six women as part of its contribution to the international peacekeeping effort. The primary mission of these women will be to function as interlocutors with the women of Iraq, thus respecting local customs. The planned deployment of TFX will be for six months. HOAF officials have indicated a second volunteer task force will be readied to replace TFX at the end of the six month deployment.

[1](#)5. (SBU) On July 7 PolMilOff visited Honduran military base at Tamara to review the progress of TFX. Base commanders and TFX officers all reported good progress and high moral, although one officer noted that the young age of many of the enlisted soldiers could potentially be problematic due to their inexperience. Nine members of Joint Task Force Bravo

(JTF-B) were also present as observers to verify that TFX members are able to complete the 33 assigned principal tasks (and the many subsets below them) necessary before the deployment can go forward. JTF-B personnel reported good progress by the Honduran troops toward these goals.

16. (SBU) While the training of TFX is proceeding on schedule, sustainment and equipment needs continue to be a challenge. TFX members still do not know exactly how they will deploy to Iraq or how their other logistical needs will be met. Prior to any deployment, the GOH must also complete a SOFA agreement with the Government of Kuwait (ref D). The GOH is working hard toward the completion of a SOFA in order to have the agreement in place before the end of July. The current target date for the arrival of TFX to Iraq is sometime in mid-August with the stand-up of the force projected for September 1.

Vetting of TFX

17. (SBU) Post understands the necessity to vet TFX members for human rights abuses due to the fact that the unit will be receiving USG funding. This process is moving forward and should be completed soon. In the interim, the HOAF assured Post verbally that none of the members of TFX participated in the incident at the El Porvenir prison where 68 people were killed, many purportedly at the hands of GOH security forces (ref B).

Political Environment

18. (C) Honduras, under the leadership of President Maduro, was an early member of the Coalition of the Willing, and remains a supporter of the U.S. position on Iraq. The HOAF is also interested in increasing its participation in international peacekeeping missions, although at this point without significant USG assistance this is not a foreseeable option. While the deployment of TFX to Iraq has not generated much public debate, apart from the usual denunciations of the Bloque Popular (a coalition of leftist activists), if TFX were to sustain even minimal casualties, public opinion could turn rapidly against Honduran participation in the reconstruction of Iraq.

19. (U) On July 16 the National Innovation and Unity Party (PINU), a minor opposition party in the national congress, announced it is planning to introduce a resolution to block the planned troop deployment due to concerns about the security situation in Iraq. PINU members also pointed to the fact that U.S. forces have yet to discover any weapons of mass destruction, which they charge undermines the legitimacy of U.S. forces in Iraq. However, their main fear remains the risk of Honduran casualties. This effort, which has little chance of success, is politically inspired to further place responsibility for the troop deployment squarely on Maduro's Nationalist Party.

110. (C) Comment: The GOH is hoping for generous USG military assistance for its participation as a member of the Coalition of the Willing, one of the first countries to sign and ratify an Article 98 agreement, and as a nation willing to send its troops to Iraq. HOAF officials are well aware that some of their neighbors receive FMF assistance and are looking for similar funding based on Honduras' overall support of the USG foreign policy objectives. A high ranking GOH official privately questioned Honduras' knee-jerk support of U.S. international objectives, and if U.S. military assistance does not materialize, the critics may grow louder and wider among GOH officials. End Comment

Palmer